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**REMARKS**

Claims 1-4, 7, and 34-46 were previously pending in this application. Claim 1 has been amended. Specifically in claim 1, the word "manifold" has been changed to "system." Claim 1 has also been amended by changing the phrase "radially outwardly directed flange formed" to "locking formation" for antecedent support. As a result claims 1-4, 7 and 34-46 are pending for examination with claims 1 and 36 being independent claims. No new matter has been added.

**Summary of Telephone Conference with Examiner**

Applicants wish to thank Examiner Menon for the telephone interview conducted on March 13, 2006 in which the newly cited reference, Kopf, was discussed. No agreement was reached.

**Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103**

Claims 1-4, 7, and 34-46 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 over U.S. Patent No. 6,017,451 to Kopf (hereinafter Kopf) in view of U.S. Patent no. 6,048,454 to Jenkins (hereinafter Jenkins). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Kopf discloses a spider fitting for a multi-module filter system. The spider fitting 200 in Kopf includes a main hub body 202 and radially outwardly extending arms 204, 206, 208, and 210. (Kopf, col. 5, lines 9-17.) Each arm of Kopf is joined to a coupling element 220 having a flat face 222 forming a mating engagement directly with a filter module or with an interposed fitting, such as elbow 224 also having a flange 226 with a flat face 228. (Kopf, col. 5, lines 18-24.) A conventional clamp or fastener is used to secure the flange. (Kopf, col. 5, lines 24-28.) According to Kopf, the lower end of the downwardly extending segment of the arm is coupled in closed flow communication with a filter module 84. (Kopf, col. 4, lines 6-12.) The filter module in Kopf includes a filter element housing 86 enclosing a filtration element 88, with the housing 86 having at its upper portion a permeate conduit 90, and a corresponding permeate conduit 92 at the lower portion of the filter element housing. (Kopf, col. 4, lines 12-16.)

The Examiner has mischaracterized Kopf by asserting the side arms 204, 206, 208, 210 and/or elbow 224 are collars which connect to sleeves having locking formations. Kopf is completely silent as to a connecting collar and a connecting sleeve having a locking formation. Elbow 224 of Kopf comprises flange 230 having a flat face for connecting to the housing 86 of the filter module 88. Because the elbow of Kopf comprises a flat flange, it cannot be a collar as

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shown, described, and claimed in the present invention, nor as understood by those in the art to be an encircling structure. Kopf also fails to disclose, teach, or suggest a first connecting sleeve positioned about a bundle of fibers at one end of the bundle of fibers, wherein the sleeve comprises a locking formation, and a plurality of first collars constructed and arranged to receive the first connecting sleeve. As such, Kopf fails to disclose, teach, or suggest a membrane filtration system comprising, in part, at least one submodule comprising an elongate bundle of semipermeable polymeric fibers attached to a connecting sleeve having a locking formation and a connecting collar connected to a housing and releasably secured to a sleeve as recited in independent claim 1.

Jenkins discloses an oil filter pack assembly including a clamp that engages annular lips 24, 27 of top and bottom housing components 22, 23, respectively, but is also silent as to a connecting collar and an elongate bundle of semipermeable polymeric fibers attached to a connecting sleeve having a locking formation. Jenkins is also silent as to a first connecting sleeve having a locking formation and being positioned about a bundle of fibers at one end of the bundle of fibers and a plurality of first collars constructed and arranged to receive the first connecting sleeve. As such, Jenkins fails to cure the deficiencies of Kopf.

Independent claims 1 and 36 are, therefore, patentable over Kopf and Jenkins, either alone or in combination. Claims 2-4, 7, 34-35 and 37-46 depend directly or indirectly from claims 1 and 36, respectively and are patentable for at least the same reasons. Withdrawal of this office action is respectfully requested.

### CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, reconsideration is respectfully requested. This application should now be in condition for allowance; a notice to this effect is respectfully requested. If the Examiner believes, after this amendment, that the application is not in condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to call the Applicants' attorney at the telephone number listed below.

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If this response is not considered timely filed and if a request for an extension of time is otherwise absent, Applicants hereby request any necessary extension of time. Please charge the extension fee, and any other deficiency to Deposit Account No. 50/2762.

Respectfully submitted,  
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